Call for Abstracts for an International Conference

Mobile Phones, Gender & Society: Emerging Empirical Realities & Feminist Perspectives
4th & 5th June 2019

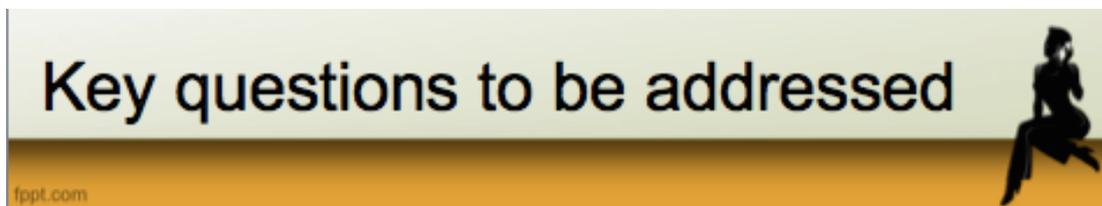## Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, INDIA

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Background Note

Mobile media and mobile technology have become the pre-eminent form and method of communication and socializing among young people globally. Young people use mobile phones as an effective means for communicating economic, social and political identities. They also use mobile phones to create, maintain and manage interpersonal, intimate and sexual relationships. The mobile revolution has created a new set of moral panics in society. While the mobile revolution is heralded by the markets and projected as hip, happening and sexy, the response from a variety of social institutions, family, schools, colleges, religious groups, traditional community leaders (*khap panchayats* in India), media, police, law and governments tell us a different story. In sexually conservative societies where pre-marital sexual relationships are either frowned upon or socially not acceptable, the opportunity to strike a romantic relationship or to access online porn is creating new moral anxieties. For women and girls, the access to the online resources through smartphones is creating new opportunities on the one hand, but extending the off-line violations and online violence through the recording of private/personal messages, forwarding sexually explicit images, cyber bullying, cyber stalking, trolling, doxing and so on. The tech-mediated online gender-based violence is equally material and corporeal for women and girls. New forms of 'victim-blaming' control the access and use of technologies and initiate surveillance on women and girls.

Due to their characteristics like accessibility, low-cost, privacy and relative anonymity, mobile media and technology have created new opportunities for romantic and sexual relations to circumvent and negotiate structural barriers created by the class, caste, ethnicity and religious gatekeeping. However, this newfound freedom is mediated through the social and legal fault lines. The recent introduction of laws such as the Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences (POCSO, 2013) in India has shifted the legal age at consent for girls to 18 years. While this has legally criminalized early age at marriage it has also criminalized consensus sexual relations among adolescents and teens. An area that is socially and legally now not tenable. Several cases are being filed all over the country under POCSO making several young men and women vulnerable to being tried under the law for getting sexually involved or eloping to marry. The mobile phone often is the villain of the story.

In South Africa, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (no.32 of 2007) enabled the state to prosecute consensual sex between teenagers who are under the age of 16 and have more than a two-year difference between them. The act compelled adults, including doctors, to report such cases. The Act was heavily criticised for the negative impact it would have on the sexual and reproductive health behaviour of young girls including undermining the Choice of Termination Act which allowed young women to access termination of their pregnancy at any age or the Child Care Act which gave 12-year-olds the right to access contraception. In June 2015, The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (no.5 of 2015) came into being. Consensual sexual activity between 12 to 16-year-olds was decriminalised while the age of consent remained at 16 years old.

The context of India and South Africa with the conflicting realities of growing sexual freedoms of young people on the one hand and the legalistic conundrum of age at consent is throwing fresh challenges to society and gender relations.

Key questions to be addressed

Broadly the following questions with reference to India and South Africa will be addressed:

1. What are the varying experiences of youth with regard to the use of mobile technologies?
2. What is the process of meaning making (identity construction) garnered through mobile phone technology– specifically relating to notions of love, sex and sexuality?
3. What are the new forms of digital based surveillance on girls, women and gender minorities?
4. What are the state, civil society and women's movements responses to tackling the divergent narratives of freedom vs control; empowerment vs violence?
5. How are concepts of 'privacy', 'agency', 'autonomy' and 'consent' being framed in the legal arena with reference to young women, which may or may not be empowering of their agency and choices?
6. Are there attempts to build progressive, empowering and gender-sensitive strategies to strengthen access to technologies on the one hand and mitigate technology-mediated violence against girls, women and gender minorities?

Important Dates

We welcome submissions that explore the questions in greater depth. We welcome abstracts of 500 words based on primary research by individual researchers or organisations; elaborate on

interventions or initiatives to address the concerns mentioned above. The abstract has to provide the details on the source of information and or the site of study.

Both young and established scholars and practitioners are welcome to apply.

Individuals whose abstracts are selected will be requested to prepare and submit complete draft papers. Their travel and hospitality will be covered to attend an international conference to be held at TISS Mumbai on 4 & 5 June 2019. Papers should be between 6000 to 8000 words. The organisers of the conference plan to work towards a book publication, hence further working on the paper is expected and authors have to be willing to work on their papers after the conference.

Important deadlines:

1. Individuals interested in submitting abstracts are encouraged to email a 500 word abstract with a title, name of the author (s), organisational affiliation and email id for communication.
2. Link for personal details https://forms.gle/ebWCc4WtwzgEk1xK6
3. Abstract to be emailed to tissllworkshop@gmail.com by **10th April 2019.**
4. Authors of selected submissions will be informed by the **14th April 2019.**
5. Draft papers to be submitted by **15th May 2019.**

For any queries, write to tissllworkshop@gmail.com

Conference Organizers:

Prof Lakshmi Lingam, School of Media and Cultural Studies, TISS, Mumbai, INDIA & Dr. Nolwazi Mkhwanazi, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SOUTH AFRICA

Conference Funder:

National Institute for the Humanities & Social Sciences, South Africa